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usually poorly spun, and the suspended object twists back and forth until finally the string parts, and the ornament drops into the cup. A person standing near claps a cloth over the receptacle to confine the "k'la." If an air-space is found at the end of the egg, it is a sign that the shade has returned; if not, the experiment must be repeated.[18]

The ceremony, "Ta hpi htaw ke a k'la," is in order when a person's sickness is attributed to the detention of his "k'la" under the water or in a swampy place. The auspices having shown the necessity for this rite and the kind of creature to be sacrificed, the performers of the rite throw up a little mound at the foot of the ladder with a sharp bamboo stick or other implement, and set upon it in order bundles of glutinous rice and jars or bamboo joints of liquor. The victim, say a fowl, is plucked, and, after the shade has been attracted by making a noise, it is addressed as the great "k'la": "If you have been drowned in the water or are anywhere under the mud or the ground; if you have been led astray in the water or the mire," says the leader, "I beg you to come back to your pleasant dwelling, to your comfortable home. Come eat delicious pork and toothsome chicken. Come and partake of sweet liquor and white rice." The victim is struck on the head with the stirring-stick, killed, and the omens examined. If these prove to be favorable, the fowl is cooked and the feast is held. As is usual in such ceremonies when the shade is believed to have returned, the wrist of the patient is tied with string to prevent its wandering again. A piece of the string, together with a morsel of the rice and meat, is placed on the fontanel ("hko hti") of the patient, which is considered the seat of the "k' la."

Prophets and Elders

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The propitiatory sacrifices discussed in the first section of this chapter are evidently tribal functions and are, therefore, inaugurated by the chiefs. Formerly men called "wi," especially designated as prophets, were consulted to interpret the auspices. On occasion they went into trances in order to reveal secrets. Their office in most of the Karen tribes was for life or while they maintained a good character, and it involved a knowledge of the ancient poetry of

[18] See p. 307 of Chapter XX (Funeral Customs) for a similar method of determining the presence of the "k' la" of the dead.

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Photo by Dr. Bunker

A Bwe Karen Prophet

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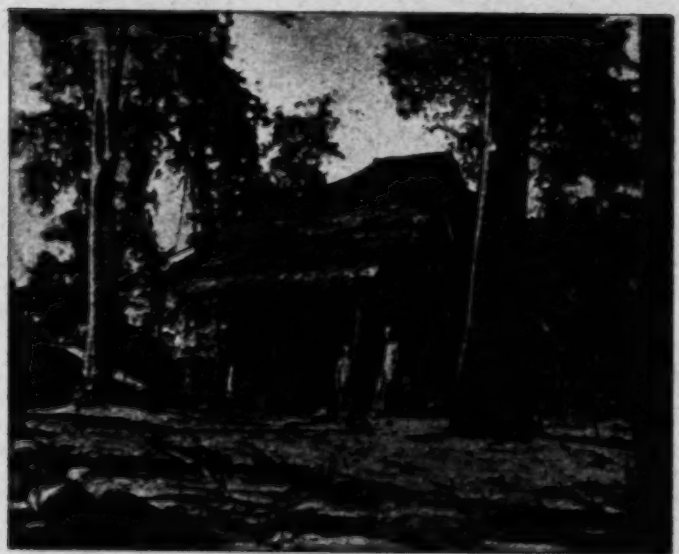

A Hut Erected in a Forest Clearing by a Self-styled Prophet as the Center of a New Karen Religious Cult of Short Duration

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the folk by which the traditions and customs were handed down from generation to generation. Among the Bwe, who seem to have esteemed priests more than the other tribes, there were four of these prophets who presided over the great sacrifice, the eldest being regarded as high priest. When one of them died, the elders assembled and chose which of his sons should inherit the office. Then, earrings, a headband, richly ornamented clothing, and a silver-mounted sword were secretly prepared for the ceremony of installation. A delegation of the elders took these gifts to the house of the chosen one, an elder going ahead to ascertain that he was at home. The party, being assured of his presence, surrounded the house to prevent his escape, which he must feign attempt. The presents were then cast before him. If he really desired to escape, he must do so before the house was surrounded.

In case the elders did not find the chosen successor at home, they laid in wait for him either by the path approaching the house or within the house itself. Sometimes an elder climbed up under the roof, hid himself until the man returned, and then dropped the gifts at his feet. The appurtenances of the priestly office, having been presented, could not be refused.[14] In some instances a "wi" was also a chief, serving thus as a leader in the tribe and in its magic. In any case he was a most important personage and was held in awe by the people.[15] Only a few of these men now remain.

The healing offerings dealt with in the second and third sections of this chapter fall generally within the province of the village elders, or are often performed by the members of the family of the sick person, for almost everybody knows more or less how to make the offerings, though this is not so true at the present time as it was a generation ago.

[14] Bunker, *Soo Tha*, pp. 64, ff.

[15] For the "wi's" connection with magic, see p. 278.

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778 become an object of veneration among the Karen is not difficult to understand in view of the prevalence of animism among Oriental peoples. Other great mountains in the East have been reverenced by the inhabitants of the region round about.

Religious Cults

792 795 Like the Jews, who two thousand years ago were constantly expecting the Messiah and followed after those who set themselves up as such, the Karen seem to have been ever ready to accept the teachings of some self-constituted prophet. Dr. Judson met with a person of this sort north of Moulmein in 1832.[4] The names of a number of these religious teachers, including a few women, are known. The founder of one of these cults, which attained a remarkable vogue and is known as the "Maw Lay," began his labors in the village of Pli hta, which lies about fifty miles north of Shwegyin, where they still point out the original pagoda and the huge stone steps leading up to it, reputed to have been built by the founder of the sect. The teaching was eclectic, as is generally true of other cults of this sort, embracing in this case the "Y'wa" and other traditions of the Karen, together with some elements of Buddhism and some of Christianity. The concluding sentence of the myth concerning the incarnation of the reputed author of this religion relates that when he appeared among the white men he was called Jesus Christ, and that when he appeared among the Karen he was known as "Maw Lay." The new cult originated about the middle of the last century and spread rapidly into almost every district where the Karen are found. At one time its adherents seem to have numbered some thousands, and a few of them still remain. They have a regular form of worship, consisting of a liturgy, hymns, and offerings of food and water.

Later movements of a similar nature, but more influenced by Christianity, have gained a large following chiefly among the non-Christian Karens, to whose national feeling the leaders have undoubtedly appealed. Conspicuous among these religious leaders has been Ko Pisan, also later known as Ko San Ye, who came from Papun or Shewegyin, entered the Baptist Mission, and for some years at the beginning of the present century exercised a considerable influence toward a real religious revival. Later he withdrew from his Baptist connection and started an independent Christian church, which has survived its founder and now has a membership

[4] Dr. Francis Mason, *The Karen Apostle*, p. 98.

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of between six and seven thousand persons. The future development of this movement will be watched with interest for, under the direction of a few trained preachers and others, it affords an excellent opportunity for the Karen to show what they can accomplish in the way of religious progress by themselves.

If they can maintain their ideals, administer the affairs and discipline of their church, and increase its membership, while continuing friendly relations with other Christian bodies in Burma, they will be worthy of all praise.

Contemporaneous with the founding of the independent church by Ko San Ye, a former priest of the Church of England started the "Hkli Bo Pa" cult in the Toungoo Hills, basing his preaching on a misapprehension of a passage of Scripture. He has instituted a form of worship with peculiar practices, has been excommunicated from the Anglican body, and has since been carrying on his labors with only indifferent success.

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fields. A native reported to me an example of productive magic in connection with the finding of a spiral coil of heavy brass wire by his great aunt. The coil was from four to six inches in diameter and was unearthed by the aunt while digging a large yam in the jungle. The coil was carried home, but at first brought only misfortune. However, in the full moon of "Thadingyut" (Burmese for October) the aunt hit upon the happy idea of offering the blood of a red cock to the spiral coil, and in due time the family became prosperous. A failure to make the annual offering was followed by ill-fortune. The offering must not be made by an unchaste person or by one who had fallen out of the house during the year. The coil, which sometimes assumed human form, must not be approached too closely. It was believed to possess the power of foretelling the future when it appeared in human shape.

The red and yellow varieties of the flowering plant, cockscomb *(Amarantus)*, which grow abundantly in the hills, are reputed to have a beneficial effect on the crops. The red variety has the added virtue, according to various tales, of dazzling the eyes of pursuing spirits, which are so attracted by it that they forget any evil intent they may have had against persons or objects. A root taken from a red cockscomb found growing in a field three years after cultivation, if bound up in the turban of a husband, will prevent the wife from conceiving, according to Karen lore. The opposite result is attained by the women of Shwegyin by wearing the bones of the "Ta t'hkaw hkaw" (a one-legged female demon) as a necklace. They buy these bones from the Brecs.[5]

Black magic is bad magic or witchcraft. The Karen speak of it as "ta ho ta yaw" or sometimes as "ta ho ta lo," meaning to work evil on a person and thereby cause his death. It is difficult to learn very much about the practices involved in the art, for those who exercise it are prone to keep their methods secret, revealing them, if at all, to one or two intimates only and thus preventing their secrets from losing their potency. By blowing on a cup of water that is later to be handed to the intended victim, the worker of black magic imparts to it a baleful action that will cause him to sicken and die. A quid of betel blown upon in the same way may be thrown at the person intended to be harmed, and, if it strikes him, will produce the fatal result desired. Some sorcerers pretend to have the power of inducing a lingering disease, which after a year or two will terminate the life of their victims. Other methods

[5] See Chapter XXII on Supernatural and Mythical Beings, p. 333.

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754 resorted to are reputed to stimulate the growth of tumors, thick
792 membranes, or bones in the bowels of a person and thus effect his premature death. It was reported to me that one sorcerer demonstrated his destructive power by coaxing a squirrel to come near and hitting it with a betel quid upon which he had blown, whereupon the little animal fell dead. The man telling me of this experiment had not witnessed it, but learned of it from one who had. The practice of magic by the blowing method is attributed to a certain man, named Saw Hteu (a famous prophet), who was gashed severely by a wild boar in the chase. The prophet blew and spat on the wounds, which healed immediately. It was said that the mastery of this method could be gained only through instruction from its author. It is a method that can be used either for good or evil purposes. Those who apply it in doing harm are often called false prophets ("wi a' bla") and are greatly feared by those Karens who are still deep in ignorance and superstition. Dr. Wade thinks this blowing charm is of Talaign origin, which is very likely, for it is used by all the peoples in Burma and is probably a survival of the old demon-worship, which still remains powerful despite centuries of Buddhist teaching.[4]

754 A well-known method of wrecking vengeance on an enemy, but one that would be used only by the most craven wizzard, is that of invoking the action of the skull of a corpse that had been left unburied. During the daytime the skull appears to be harmless enough; but at night, if magical lore is to be credited, it takes on the complete similitude of a wretched man, a kind of retributive agent, ready to be sent on a mission of murder. Another familiar method of doing evil to a person is to take a piece of his clothing, a lock of his hair, or even some of the dust from his foot-prints and, after blowing the baleful breath on whatever has been taken, to make a little image of him, stick a feather in the bottom of it, and hang it on a tree. When the wind swings this manikin to and fro, the mind of the person it represents will begin to give way, becoming capricious and unsettled. The imparting of bad luck is also accomplished by secreting a fragment of a monstrous woman's
[585] skirt in the pillow of the hated individual. I heard of a wife who did this out of spite to her husband, who had taken unto himself another woman. The result of her action was all that could have been desired, for the man finally died.

[4] *The Karen Thesaurus*, new ed., Vol. I, p. 448.

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Certain stones ("ler na") and some plants of the ginger family ("paw na") are credited with having the ability to consume food. If offered raw flesh and blood, they prefer the latter. The owners of such specimens can cause harm to any one against whom they have a grudge. In case one of the "ler na" is sent to a person, it takes on the appearance of the owner and produces the death of the recipient. Such stones, according to report, are usually picked up in swampy places, glow in the dark, and will eat into one's flesh like an acid. It seems to be customary to send one of these carnivorous stones to the intended victim when he is in a weakened condition on account of sickness. He is, therefore, in a physical state to experience such an hallucination as that referred to above.

To counteract the effects of the "ler na," a medicine is compounded from the gall-bladder of one who has suffered a violent death and been stolen from the grave at night. The remains of the gall-bladder are mixed with the charred dust scraped from the bamboos used in piercing the corpse when it was being burned. These ingredients are moistened with water and shaped into a ball, from which the patient takes doses when he finds the spell of the magic stone asserting itself. Other fragments of the medicine-ball are pulverized and scattered in the air about the patient. This internal and external treatment is supposed to afford both cure and protection from the menace of the "ler na."[7] Another method (called "po") of preventing witches and wizards from working their evil spells, is by inserting twigs of the indigo plant in the split ends of three sticks, spitting on the twigs, and offering a prayer for deliverance.

Much of the magic of the Karen prophets and "medicine-teachers" is concerned with recalling the "k'las" of sick persons. The multitude of demons and powers by which the tribesman believes himself to be surrounded, renders it next to impossible for him to tell which of these spirits is assailing him when he falls ill. Hence he calls in a diviner, unless he should undertake to consult the chicken bones or make marks on a bamboo, in order to determine for himself the cause of his sickness. When he has learned the cause, he makes offerings to placate the particular spirit concerned. In case his recovery is not as rapid as he thinks it ought to be, he calls in some "wi" to find out what the matter is and what he must do. The "wi" who was summoned to prescribe for a sick grandmother some years ago, inspected the chicken bones several times and, when

7 Dr. Wade, The Karen Thesaurus, new ed., Vol. I, p. 463.

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774 792 755 he got a satisfactory divination, placed some rice, cooked chicken, and liquor on a tray and drew it along the floor of the house to the top of the ladder at the entrance. He then ran a string from the tray down the ladder to the ground for the old woman's "k' la" or shade to come up on. The "k' la" did not return because, as the witch-doctor explained, it was held captive in a betel-box by some one. Thereupon, he asked for seven cubits of white cloth, wound it about himself, and lay down to sleep with a "dah" (large knife) and an axe on either side of him. With the shades of these tools in hand his "k' la" was to go and release the shade or spirit of the grandmother. On awaking, the witch-doctor reported that he had had a hard struggle and been shot at by the man who was restraining the old woman's spirit from returning, but that he had succeeded in releasing it. When the doctor unwrapped himself, so the granddaughter of the patient told me, the cloth was riddled with what appeared to be shot holes. The string on the ladder was broken, showing conclusively that the "k' la" had returned at last. A piece of this string was now tied around the patient's wrist to prevent her spirit from again escaping. Needless to say, the old woman recovered her health.

764 789 A ceremony is sometimes observed among the Karen to keep the "k' la" of a deceased person from aimlessly wandering about and to beguile it into remaining with the corpse, until it shall depart to the king of spirits. In this ceremony the coffined body is placed in the center of the floor. A slender rod of bamboo is inserted in a hole in the coffin lid, a thread reaching from the tip of the bamboo to the floor. This thread has small tufts of cotton and bits of charcoal tied to it in alternate order throughout its length. Under the loose end of the thread a small cup containing a hard-boiled egg is placed. A silver or brass ring hangs at the end of the thread just over the cup. In case the thread is drawn downward with some force so that it vibrates or breaks, the "k' la" is supposed to have returned from its wanderings, otherwise not. Colonel MacMahon relates that he watched an experiment of this kind, but that when he required everybody to go a considerable distance from the cup, nothing happened.[1]

826 828 Among the Karen and Burmese the abdomen is held to be the seat of the passions and the diseases, varying moods and bodily

[1] A similar ceremony is gone through at noon of the last day of the funeral rites. See *ante*, p. 237; Col. A. R. MacMahon, *The Karens of the Golden Chersonese*, p. 188; Cross, in the *Journal, American Oriental Society*, Vol. I.